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ABSTRACT

Studies indicate that many teachers leave the profession within the first 5 years, and that often the most highly qualified and skilled teachers are the most likely to leave. Student-teachers and beginning teachers tend to have idealized aspirations for their teaching. However, the reality of secondary schools is that myriad forces will undermine even the most sincere efforts by these young teachers. Although the reasons for the exodus from teaching are discouraging and complex, teachers can resist victimization resulting from isolation and frustration, especially during first-year teaching, by developing a "proactive" approach. Stephen Covey explains that successful people develop the ability to control their responses to the world around them by adopting a "proactive" stance rather than a reactive stance. Student teachers must develop a proactive approach to their circle of influence, and should be supported in this effort by the state and national levels of the profession. The English Education program at Illinois State University has developed a program to help students make the transition from the university to the larger discourse community. This program focuses on professional credibility (writing for publication); scholarly activities (seminars, conferences, and in-service programs); and continuing participation in professional organizations and university/school collaboration programs. The program has had a very favorable response from participants, suggesting a new model which can help new teachers to develop support networks as they make the transition from student to professional. (HB)

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EMPOWERING ONE ANOTHER: WIN/WIN INTERACTIONS BETWEEN UNIVERSITIES AND SECONDARY SCHOOLS

Speaker #2: Ruth Fennick
Illinois State University

COMBATING NEW TEACHER BURNOUT: PROVIDING SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Studies show that many of the most talented teachers leave the profession within five years. Although the reasons for this exodus are discouraging and complex, teachers can resist victimization resulting from isolation and frustration especially prevalent during first-year teaching by developing a "proactive" approach. University/school collaboration programs emphasizing teachers as researchers and scholars can help new teachers to develop support networks as they make the transition from student to professional.

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COMBATING NEW TEACHER BURNOUT: PROVIDING SUPPORT NETWORKS FOR PERSONAL AND PROFESSIONAL GROWTH

Ruth Fennick

Illinois State University

AMERICAN SCHOOLS IN CRISIS

A recent issue of Teacher Magazine notes that each spring approximately 100,000 young people complete their college preparation, eager to begin teaching: ". . . [T]hey have a sense of mission, they have heard the call." However, for many of them the first year will be filled with "despair and frustration." Although most survive, according to one study, "more than 30,000 of them will leave the field within the next five years" (3). Sadly, studies also show that "the most highly qualified and capable teachers are the most likely to leave" (85).

American education is in a crisis, as news accounts relentlessly remind us. Unfortunately, some teachers deserve the pejorative connotation of being "only a classroom teacher"--they have acquiesced to the demands of endless paperwork without claiming equal time for their own renewal. They have become uninspired drudges.

STUDENT TEACHERS' IDEALS

They don't start out that way. Each spring, as we prepare our student teachers for their school internships,

we listen to their lofty aspirations and hope that the schools will not destroy their spirit. One student wrote in her journal last month, after one week of student teaching, "[Students] seem eager for me to begin teaching. I . . . hope that I can live up to their expectations." Another learned that students' academic success depends on their personal well-being. She wrote:

> One of my students was just released from Lifeway [where she had gone following a suicide attempt] . . . . The day she came back I told her that we had already started the book [The Outsiders] and . . . that we would work on catching her up. She finished it all in one night and [wanted more of Hinton's books]. . . . When things like this happen, I know that I have decided the right career for me!

An especially poignant story came from a student teacher who told about watching her cooperating teacher respond to a student's personal tragedy. The cooperating teacher, learning that a student's mother had just died, held the girl in her arms and cried with her. This experience, more than any other, the student teacher said, caused her to realize the enormous responsibility teachers have--a responsibility that reaches far beyond academic achievement.

Following a mixture of successes and frustrations, student teachers end their internship on a high note, leaving their schools with accolades from students,

cooperating teachers, school administrators, and university supervisors. They are ready to effect change.

SECONDARY SCHOOL REALITIES

What we know--but they, as yet, do not--is that myriad forces will undermine their efforts. By the time they have suffered the indignity of the job search, they have only the first indication of the grim realities awaiting them.

They discover that their methods class theories are often unappreciated. One of last year's most talented student teachers, proudly describing her best student-centered plans to her principal, earned the response, "This is something that you would do on a Friday, right?" The same teacher, in her small rural school, serves as librarian, yearbook sponsor, cheerleading coach, and department chair, in addition to teaching five classes a day.

Salaries, as we know, are equally disappointing. One of our student teachers last year--a young man with excellent credentials--was offered $12,000 a year at one school and felt enormously fortunate when he landed a job for $19,000.

Perhaps most destructive is the loneliness. Robert Alfonso and Lee Goldsberry claim that

> One of the tragedies of American education is that teachers work in isolation. Their immediate

> superiors often have only a . . . generalized perception of their teaching performance. Teaching is still largely a solo act, observed, appreciated, and evaluated primarily by students. There is little contact among colleagues, classroom doors are seldom opened to each other, and teachers who are members of the same staff in the same school, even in the same grade or discipline, maintain a collusive and almost deliberate ignorance of the work of their peers. . . . [feeling] little or no responsibility for helping to ensure the success of a new teacher. ("Colleagueship in Supervision," Supervision of Teaching, 91).

For the new teacher the classroom "becomes a private enclave and a retreat from the outside world as well as a retreat from the world within the school" (Alfonso 103), especially in schools where a climate of competition has been created by the administration (Alfonso 104).

Cut off professionally from colleagues engaged in developing new ideas, teachers fall victim to what Peter Elbow calls the "monolithic model" of secondary schools, schools which are less inclined than either elementary schools or colleges to conduct research (222). Although sports programs provide generous stipends for faculty sponsors, equivalent financial support is scarce for academic projects or conferences.

COPING STRATEGIES

These frequently-documented causes of teacher frustration are discouragingly complex and, from all indications, not soon to be remedied. Student teachers are often, and wisely, advised to combat the resulting stress and burnout by developing collegiality with other faculty. Some schools do, indeed, provide nurturing for their new teachers. However, too often heavy workloads, or embarrassment about mistakes or ignorance, keep new teachers from reaching out. Furthermore, sometimes new teachers find that, in their new environments, they are surrounded by enemies. Students, parents, administrators, and colleges blame them for student failures. Even their most supportive colleagues often unwittingly undermine their success. Popular jokes about the infamous "teacher's lounge" reflect the destructive and pervasive negativism in too many secondary schools.

A strategy suggested by one current textbook for student teachers suggests that student teachers need to try to control their negative feelings and avoid criticism--internal and external--by keeping accurate records, designing attractive classrooms, developing good physical and mental health habits, forgiving themselves when they are not "super teachers," and reciting ten times each day the following seven guides:

I will be as forgiving of myself as I am of students.

I will be realistic and won't dwell on mistakes.

This too shall pass.

Everything is a learning experience.

It seemed like the best thing to do at the time.

Mistakes are learning opportunities

I'll do my best every day, then I won't worry.

As valuable as these guides may be, notice that they focus on the teacher as victim. Instead of focusing on failure and victimization, we need to emphasize the possibilities, however limited they may at first seem.

A current concept in business settings is "pro-activity," a key principle in Stephen Covey's motivational text Seven Habits of Highly Effective People. Covey emphasizes successful people's ability to control their responses to the world around them. Successful people, Covey claims, adopt a "proactive" rather than reactive stance. Covey explains that, although much of what happens around us is beyond our control, we each have what he calls a "circle of influence""--circumstances and people in our immediate environment that we can affect. Essential to this "proactive" approach, according to Covey, is a person's ability to take risks. But risk-taking is not possible, he argues, without a strong sense of self-worth. Furthermore, to maintain their self-esteem, people need constant renewal. He tells a story of two wood choppers, one of whom stopped to rest ten minutes every hour, the other continuing to chop. At the end of the day, they saw that the first man, the one taking breaks, had chopped more wood. The second man, greatly chagrined, asked how this

could be. The first man explained that, during each of his ten-minute breaks, he had sharpened his axe.

Our student teachers need to learn to take a proactive approach in their circles of influence. They need to find ways of controlling their responses to negative forces over which they have no control, to develop self-esteem, and to nurture that self-esteem by building time into their lives for personal and professional renewal. Most efforts directed toward improving education focus on disciplining teachers--making them more accountable--rather than finding ways of raising their self-esteem and, thus, their effectiveness. We need to help our student teachers to find shortcuts that don't shortchange the students but that do free teachers to sharpen their professional axes. We need to find ways of helping them to lighten the paper load and avoid the nose to the grindstone mentality. Instead of concentrating on working harder, they need to find ways of working smarter. The process approach to writing, conferencing, peer response groups, collaborative grouping, increased use of journal writing, holistic grading, and portfolios offer promise and, thus, merit greater attention in secondary classrooms.

New teachers also need to get support from their profession at the state and national levels. NCTE's Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers notes that teachers must not only contribute to the professional community but that they must also "be nurtured by it" (15).

Like their students, these teachers need to have rewards for things well done. They need to be able to find joy in their work. Instead of telling them to read professional publications, we need to tell them to contribute to them. Through collaboration with other professionals as teacher/scholar/researchers, our new teachers will find that, as they enrich the profession, they too will be enriched.

ISU'S ENGLISH EDUCATION PROGRAM

PRE-STUDENT TEACHING

At Illinois State we have developed programs to help our English Education students make the transition from the university to the larger discourse community. During pre-student teaching writing classes, we encourage students to write for publication in real markets. Each semester I have students in my Advanced Composition classes, at least half of whom are also English Education majors, submit manuscripts for publication in appropriate markets, and each semester several students have their manuscripts accepted. Students think of themselves as writers--professionals submitting manuscripts to public forums--thus credible teachers of writing. The effect on students of having "published" writers as teachers is powerful. One student teacher, currently teaching in a small rural school writes a daily sports column for a local paper, complete with byline. His students are benefiting from his

expertise: he has arranged to have their newspaper printed and distributed as a supplement to the city paper.

Our student teachers are also encouraged to see themselves as teacher/researchers. In our two English Education methods classes this semester, students are required to identify issues that they can test during student teaching. The culminating project for student teaching will be an article based on their research. These articles will be published in a class book and distributed to students and their cooperating teachers at our annual banquet honoring the student teachers. Students will be encouraged to submit these articles for publication in appropriate professional journals. One student this semester is collaborating with her cooperating teacher on a series of cross-disciplinary units in language arts. In addition to submitting this article for publication, they are submitting a proposal for presentation of their work at a professional conference.

DURING STUDENT TEACHING

As university supervisors, we find it valuable to keep in close touch with our student teachers through weekly journal entries: they write to us and we write back. In addition to five on-site visits by supervisors, twice during the eleven weeks of student teaching we meet with all of the student teachers. They return to campus for half-day professional seminars to discuss successes, share ideas, solve problems, and "touch base" literally and

figuratively with their peers and supervisors.

We encourage cooperating teachers, whenever possible, to include our student teachers in their plans to attend professional conferences and in-service workshops. This year's conferences so far have included a three-day writing workshop, a district-wide literary festival, a Mid-state Reading Council meeting, an Optimist Club meeting and dinner, a state sponsored conference on middle level instruction, and staff development workshops on collaboration, mainstreaming, and inter-disciplinary studies.

POST-STUDENT TEACHING

Following student teaching, the collegial relationships between university faculty and student teachers is further emphasized when we invite former student teachers to speak to current student teachers during our final seminar sessions. These recent graduates are eager and honored to be able to share in the training of new teachers, and we get valuable feedback about the effectiveness of our program. Furthermore, current student teachers see that they, too, can continue to gain support from--and provide support to--the university.

Participation in Professional Organizations

Shortly before graduation, our student teachers attend a one-day Conference for Heads of Illinois Secondary

English Departments hosted by our English Department. Our student teachers attend conference sessions, serve on panels, and make make important professional contacts. We have a table where they display their resumes, and we formally introduce them at the annual luncheon as special guests of the conference.

We strongly encourage student teachers to join NCTE and its state affiliate, IATE. Last year we arranged to have a six of our new graduates serve as chairs and recorders for the annual conference of the Illinois Association of Teachers of English. These teachers drove five hours; paid for their own transportation, hotel rooms, conference registration, and meals; and, after the conference, expressed enormous gratitude for having had the opportunity to participate.

School-University Collaborative Programs

Much of our success in our teacher training program is due to the good relationships that ISU has developed through collaborative programs with secondary teachers. In fact, these programs have resulted in the recruitment of many outstanding cooperating teachers, teachers whose interest, like ours, is in life-long learning. James Gray, speaking for the National Endowment for the Humanities, one of the sponsors of a recent program, reported,

> Throughout my participation in the program I sensed nothing but the most open, helpful and

> collegial attitude possible toward classroom teachers in this university-based program . . . ; there was no hint of condescension, no hint of the traditional top-down university ways of doing things. (60)

He predicted: "The NEH Institute has made a major start in creation of a corp of Teacher/Scholars in Illinois whose teaching will forever be changed" (60). Eleven of these outstanding teacher/scholars are currently serving as cooperating teachers for our student teachers, providing models of professionalism and scholarship.

RESPONSE TO OUR PROGRAM

Our program has had a favorable response from the schools where our student teachers have been placed. One student teacher this year wrote in her first weekly journal,

> I did not anticipate receiving such a positive response from the faculty and the students. I had prepared myself for a situation in which I would be considered an outsider. I have found quite the contrary. I have been treated as an equal among the faculty members. . . ; I have been asked questions about the curriculum, [asked] what "new" ideas I have come in contact with for designing a more effective writing class. . . . I cannot express what a tremendous

boost to my ego it is to know that they value my opinions.

CONCLUSION

NCTE's Guidelines for the Preparation of Teachers of English Language Arts emphasizes the importance of teachers' continuing growth:

> [T]eachers should not consider their preparation ended when they receive permanent certificates and tenure in their jobs. Teaching involves the growth of an individual as a professional, as a scholar, and as a human being--growth which develops only through experience in teaching and through lifelong learning. (4)

The cooperating teachers who direct our students in the schools provide evidence that these high ideals can survive, even after many years of service. These teachers tell us that they are richly rewarded by having our students. They keep up with "cutting edge" ideas and, at the same time, have an opportunity to make an important contribution to the field. By reaching out to serve the profession, they avoid isolation, reject cynicism, and enrich us all. It is this powerful model that we need to promote for all of our teachers.

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